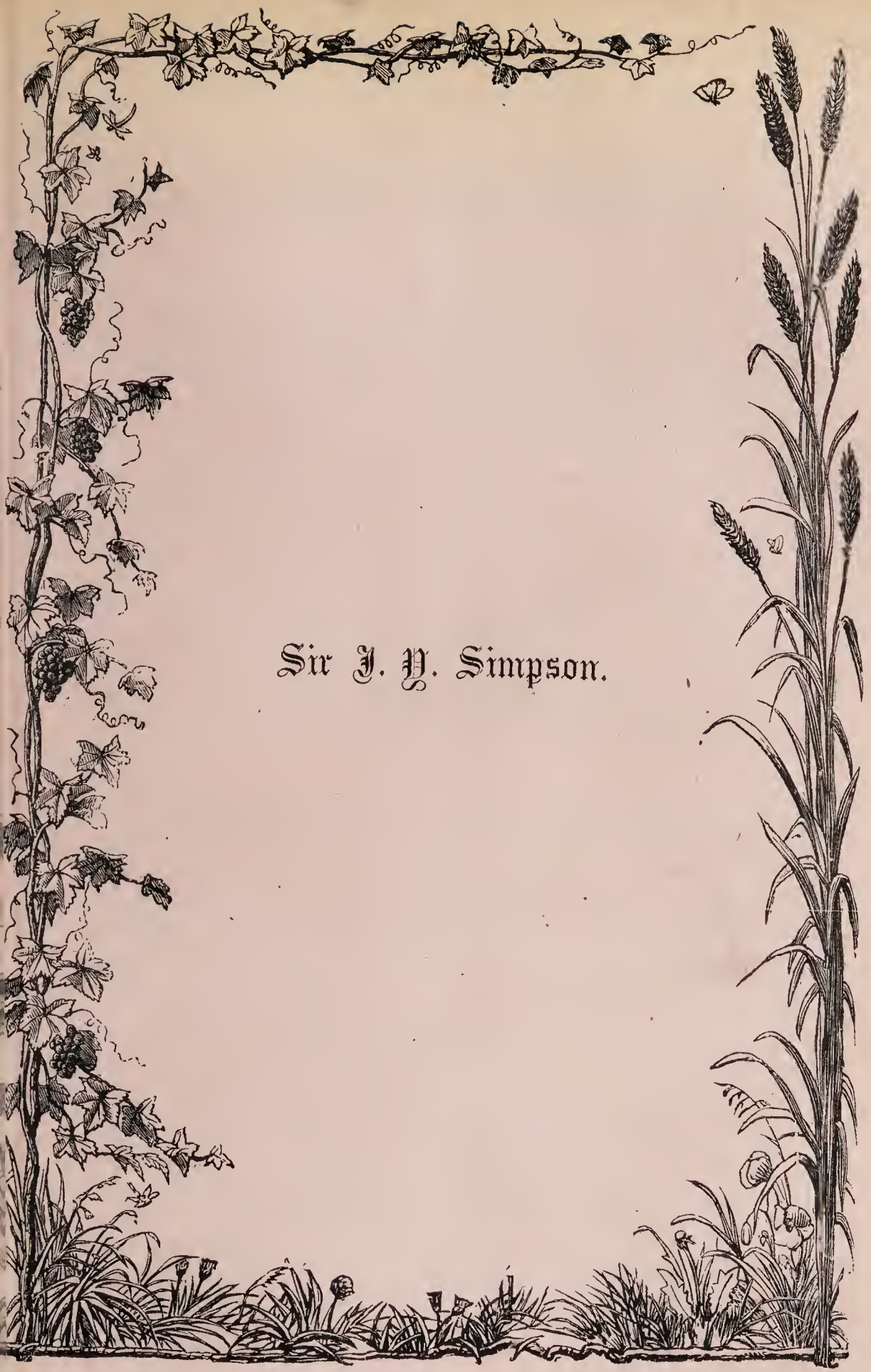




Sir J. W. Simpson.



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SIR JAMES YOUNG SIMPSON.

ON the 6th of May, 1870, a deep gloom was cast over the city of Edinburgh by the news that Sir James Young Simpson, Bart., M.D., had breathed his last. Sir James was a man of whom Edinburgh might well be proud. He was one of its most eminent physicians; for many years he filled the chair of an important medical department in its university; he was the discoverer of a method by which, perhaps more than by any other discovery of medical science, human suffering has been alleviated; and his fame had attracted crowds of patients from all parts of the world. He was, moreover, during the last eight or nine years of his life, a sincere and lowly follower of the Lord Jesus Christ. On this last account especially we have thought it right to present to our readers a brief sketch of his life and character.

Sir James Simpson was what is often termed "a self-made man." His father was a baker in the village of Bathgate, in Linlithgowshire, and James was the eighth child of the family and the youngest son. He had the great misfortune to lose his mother—a woman of considerable energy of character and of rare Christian worth—when he was only nine years of age. Mrs. Simpson lived long enough, however, to exert an influence on her son, by her teachings, her example, and her earnest prayers, which bore precious fruit in after years. The family were thoroughly united; and in nothing were the senior members of it more entirely one than in their self-denying love to James, and in their resolve that he should have the best possible education, and so be fitted for a higher position in life than that which they themselves occupied. They felt quite sure that "he would be great some day." He was generally

at the head of his class at school, and his thirst for knowledge was insatiable.

At the age of fourteen he entered the University of Edinburgh and he was fortunate enough, in his second session, to be a successful competitor for a bursary; but, although a regular and attentive student, it soon became evident that his reputation was not to be won either in classics, or mathematics, or moral philosophy. In a great measure through his association with an old school-fellow, a student of medicine, with whom he lodged, he very soon made choice of the medical profession; and from that time he devoted himself to preparation for it as the work of his future life. He became a pupil of the celebrated Liston, whose certificates attest that he worked under him with great zeal and industry, both as a pupil in his classes and as a surgeon's dresser in the Royal Infirmary. Whilst yet scarcely nineteen years of age, he was admitted a member of the Royal College of Surgeons, Edinburgh; and at twenty-one he received his degree of Doctor of Medicine.

The excellence of an inaugural dissertation, which he prepared for the latter occasion, attracted the attention of Dr. John Thompson, a physician of great eminence and Professor of Pathology in the University, who immediately proposed to him to become his assistant in his practice—an offer which he promptly and thankfully accepted. Through the advice of Dr. Thompson he directed his special attention to the study of obstetric medicine, with the view of becoming a teacher of that department of medical science; and “with characteristic promptness, energy, and earnestness, he began at once to seek distinction in the scientific literature of the department of his choice.”

In the year 1837, five years after he had taken his degree, through the strong recommendation of Dr. Thompson, he was appointed Assistant Professor of Pathology; and in 1840, after a sharp and exciting contest, he was elected, by the narrow majority of one, Professor of Midwifery to the University. Up till now

his life, like that of many medical men at the commencement of their course, had been a hard struggle. For some time past, however, his practice had been steadily increasing. The battle was not yet over; but his election proved, as he felt confident it would do, the turning-point of his professional life. From that time, the increase in his practice was rapid and important; and he was very soon on the highway to both wealth and fame. He found his house in Albany Street too small for the number of patients who waited on him, and he removed to a much larger one in the heart of the city. The numbers still increased, till at length it became a common thing for two large drawing-rooms to be completely filled with patients eagerly waiting for his advice and help. From five to six hours a day were set apart for such consultations, and still the time was too short. Besides all this, there were vast numbers of patients whom he visited at their own residences; and urgent requests were sent to him from distant parts of the country, which he found it difficult to refuse, and with which he complied as far as possible. It must not be supposed, however, that he rendered his services only to those from whom he expected large fees. There were very many from whom he absolutely refused to receive the slightest remuneration. In this class were included not only members of his own profession and their families, but all ministers of religion and any whom he had reason to believe to be in straitened circumstances. Nor was the attention he gave in such cases rendered grudgingly or carelessly: it was just as great and just as kind as that which he paid to the wealthiest and the noblest in the land. "Those on whom he waited," says his excellent biographer, Dr. Duns, "and the poor, the widow, and the fatherless, for whom his help was ever ready and free, would not have felt it unbecoming, had he taken up the words of one who in the olden time found some solace in the midst of overwhelming sorrow, in remembering his work among men,—‘When the ear heard me, then it blessed me, and when the eye saw me,

it gave witness to me : because I delivered the poor that cried, and the fatherless, and him that had none to help him. The blessing of him that was ready to perish came upon me, and I caused the widow's heart to sing for joy.' ”

Here was work for at least two ordinary men ; yet this was by no means all. During the sessions of the University, his classes were punctually met, and the duties they involved were discharged with the utmost efficiency and success. “ On his appointment to the professorship,” says Dr. Duns, “ he soon fulfilled the highest expectations of the patrons. His class at once became popular. Students crowded its benches. Many who had even long passed away from college life took tickets for his class, that with him they might survey those new and fresh fields of study into which he led his pupils. By bringing weight of character, scientific attainments, professional breadth of view, and richly-varied literary accomplishments to the illustration of the studies of his special department, he lifted it into a higher position as an important branch of medical science than it had ever held before.” But his thoughts were by no means absorbed in his own peculiar sphere. “ He had an eye for the whole field of professional effort. No paper of any value in medical literature escaped his notice.” He found time also for important contributions to scientific literature, several of them of permanent value. He took a deep interest in archæological studies, which he prosecuted with great zest and vigour ; he kept up a large correspondence, which must have made great demands on his time ; and all through life he exercised a large and generous hospitality.

But Dr. Simpson's name, as we have already intimated, is associated with one of the most important medical discoveries of modern times. Whilst a student he had witnessed the terrible agony of a poor Highland woman under a surgical operation ; and such was the effect on his mind, that he resolved to give up his profession, and he actually went straight to the Parliament

House to seek work as a writer's clerk. On second thoughts, however, he resolved to stay where he was; but from that time the question was ever more or less distinctly present to his mind, "Can anything be done to make operations less painful?" He held, and rightly, that "the proud mission of the physician was distinctly two-fold—to alleviate human suffering as well as to preserve human life."

It must be clearly stated that the merit of discovering the use of anæsthetic agents in surgical operations is not claimed for Dr. Simpson; all that is claimed for him is the application of chloroform by inhalation for this purpose, and yet further, its use in Dr. Simpson's special department of the profession. In 1846 Mr. Liston performed some very important operations whilst the patients were under the influence of sulphuric ether, an agent which had been previously applied for dental purposes in America. The result convinced Dr. Simpson that the severest surgical operations might be rendered painless. The subject took entire possession of his thoughts, and he revolved it night and day. As he wrote to one of his brothers, he "could think of nought else." But there were objections, he thought, to the use of ether, and he set himself to find out some other anæsthetic agent. For this purpose he made extensive inquiries and tried upon himself many experiments; and at length he came to the conclusion that he had found what he desired in the vapour of chloroform. He immediately proclaimed his discovery to the world, strongly urging its use in surgical operations generally, and not least to his own department. Like nearly all other important discoveries, it was some time before it won its way to general acceptance. There were medical men who objected that it was unsafe, and there were people who insisted that we had no right to lessen the bitterness of the primal curse. The objections were fully met; and long before his death, Dr. Simpson had the delight of knowing that his discovery was welcomed by the vast majority of his professional brethren through-

out the world. We believe that comparatively few surgical operations are now performed except under the influence of chloroform or some other anæsthetic agent. Through its use, operations which otherwise would have been unattempted because of their extreme peril are performed with safety; a vast amount of terrible suffering, which it would be impossible to calculate, is daily spared; and many precious lives are prolonged which would otherwise be greatly shortened. Is there no reader of these pages who has had personal reason to thank God for this beneficent discovery?

In the beginning of 1847, Dr. Simpson was appointed one of the Queen's physicians for Scotland, and in 1866 he received from her Majesty, unsolicited, the honour of a baronetcy. Two years later, the magistrates and council of Edinburgh voted him the freedom of their city. Thus honoured at home, honours poured in upon him from all parts of the world. "To Edinburgh," says Dr. Duns, "the rank and intelligence of many lands looked especially as the place of his residence. His name was famous over the civilized world. The learned societies of every land bore hearty tribute to his greatness. The list of his honours would fill pages." We would gladly enumerate some of them; but our space forbids. For the same reason we must pass without any mention whatever important services which Sir James Simpson rendered to medical and general science and to the great interests of humanity.

Hitherto we have not said more than a single word respecting Sir James Simpson's religious convictions and principles; but we have now much to tell which we feel sure will be read with the deepest interest.

For the greater part of his life the grand concerns of salvation and eternity were all but entirely neglected. "During his college life," says his biographer, "all his thoughts were given to study or amusement. In the first years of his professional duties his path was rugged and thorny. A hard fight with straitened means and worldly difficulties kept him at work, which engrossed

his whole time and attention. In later years, his very success brought its characteristic snares. He had fought his way into fame and worldly comfort. Was not this the end of his exertions—the highest and best reward? He had come to be regarded by many as a Christian. The title “Christian Physician” was freely given to him. Schemes of Christian philanthropy were submitted for his approval. He was pressed to undertake duties which could only be done to profit by men consciously united to Christ. He had even reached to an intellectual perception of the true character of works not done as unto God. Yet he afterwards spoke of this period as a time when he was living without God in the world.” It was not till the year 1861, when he was fifty years of age, that the “old things passed away and all things became new.”

It will be asked how this great change was brought about. First, there were the recollections of his mother's teachings and his mother's goodness, which he never forgot. Let us believe, too, that his mother's prayers followed him through all his life.

In a letter to a friend, written early in 1862, he says: “I have a patient, a dear, dear friend. If you ever come north again, I have promised her you would meet. In a day or two I will send you a little beautiful book,* she is now publishing. She has, indeed, been a kind of ‘well of living water’ to me and mine.” During the summer and autumn of 1861, both Dr. Simpson and his nephew and assistant, Dr. Alexander Simpson, were brought professionally into frequent contact with this lady and her household. Husband, wife, and daughter, were all deeply concerned for the spiritual good of their medical attendants; from time to time, kind, faithful, wise words were dropped; letters were written by the patient to Dr. Simpson, relating, it may be, in part to other matters, but always containing something bearing more or less directly on the great subject which most absorbed her thoughts; and she and her family never

* “The Child of the Kingdom.”—By M. F. B.

ceased to remember their medical advisers and friends in earnest prayer. Nor were these the only persons, who, thankful for his kindly attentions and for the priceless blessing of relief from suffering, and of health, which they enjoyed through his instrumentality, repaid their debt in part by pleading for him with God.

At the same time in many parts of Scotland there was an awakened interest in the great concerns of salvation, and the gospel of "Christ crucified" was preached with special power and success; and at length, in God's great mercy, it reached the heart of Dr. Simpson. He became dissatisfied with himself and restless, and he saw himself to be a sinner needing salvation. Then arose the question, which of all questions he now felt to be the most important, "What must I do to be saved?" One evening, under thoughts and feelings like these, he went to see the friends whom we have just mentioned. "I felt," he said, "I must go somewhere to-night. I thought of Duns and Hanna; but I have come to you." Then he added sadly, "I wish to come to Christ, but I don't see Him." His friends conversed with him for some time, and through God's mercy their counsels were not in vain. Before 1861 had passed away he entered a sick-room saying, "My first happy Christmas—my only happy one."

Soon after this great change, an event occurred which brought out very prominently the simplicity and strength of Dr. Simpson's new-found faith. His third son James had from childhood been an invalid and a great sufferer, and on the 16th February, 1862, he died. Writing to his brother, Alexander, he said: "He died most calmly and peacefully, just before the church-bells began to ring. I gave him over into the arms of Christ, in the full faith that he was utterly safe in His keeping, and that, after all, though we all loved him dearly, God loved and loves him still more, infinitely more." To a friend in London he wrote: "Jamie became a changed boy for many months before he died, and perhaps he was one of the great means—(let me whisper this in your ear) for

God has raised up others—why my whole household has seemed to change too. He was led (how, I will tell you, if we ever meet again) to see that time was a transitory moment indeed as compared with the eternity of eternity, and at last placed such faith (faith so simple, and full, and pure) in the certainty of salvation through the atoning blood of Christ, that for a length of time he was able to look forward to death utterly without fear.” In a letter to another friend, he mentions an incident the recollection of which had much to do with his own subsequent open and manly avowal of Christ. “In one of the last debates which the children had in the nursery, just a fortnight before Jamie left us, there was a difference of opinion as to whether little, wee folks like they—now that God had shown them His infinite love—should speak of Christ to their companions. Jamie decided it all at last to them by the declaration, ‘We must speak for Jesus; for it is,’ he summed up, ‘a glorious thing to do so.’ Ten days afterwards, God suddenly summoned him away from earth to heaven.”

In the same letter, after a few interesting paragraphs, he says: “I was asked on Saturday to address the next religious monthly meeting of the medical students. At first I thought that was impossible; but then the commission of Jamie, ‘We must speak for Jesus,’ came rapping at the door of my heart; and with God’s gracious help I am to do it.”

The address was delivered, and a striking, beautiful address it was, full of gospel truth, and appealing to his hearers with the most tender earnestness to open their hearts to Christ. About a fortnight previously, he presided at the last of a series of special religious services held in Queen Street Hall, and he spoke on the occasion with great simplicity and power. He sometimes also presided at the meeting of the Carruber’s Close Mission, where on Sabbath evenings an audience of about two thousand meets regularly to listen to the Word of God. On one of these occasions he delivered a stirring address on the words, “Dead in trespasses and sins;” which was

subsequently published as a tract by the Religious Tract Society.

It will be taken for granted that a man of scientific tastes and acquirements like Dr. Simpson, would, whilst a stranger to the saving power of the gospel, be especially disposed to sympathise with those speculative doubts which, we regret to say, such men so often cherish. That was the fact; but his biographer tells us, that even before he emerged from his darkness into the glorious light of salvation, his doubts were entirely dispelled. "My speculative doubts," he early said, "have all passed away." Those doubts had specially influenced him on the subject of prayer, and he had held "that most unscientific view of natural law, which represents the Almighty as dethroned by the forces He has Himself brought into activity, and excluded from that right of control over the fruits of His own will and power, which we never deny to man over his." But now there was a complete change. "Dr. Simpson," says Dr. Duns, "at once saw that, as a child of God, he was called on to hold towards God a bearing having some analogy to that which His own children exercised towards himself. As children they"—Christians—"had no right to ask for any other explanation than what came to them in the statement of their Father's will. Now God's will is, 'In everything, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, make your requests known.' This is enough. It is made on the ground of love and trust. But if we leave this ground, and demand a clear intellectual discernment of the harmony between eternal Divine purpose and prevailing prayer, we virtually leave the Father's household. We no longer trust as children. We seek a knowledge necessarily beyond our reach, and we lose the blessing which He has put into our hand. The only point of rest is the position in which Dr. Simpson found it—faith."

As a practical illustration of his altered views on this matter, we may give a brief extract from one of his letters:—"I have sometimes thought of writing to tell

you how of late the love of God to me and mine has been perfectly transcendent. Christ seems to have taken one and all of my family to Himself for the children of His kingdom. You gave me such good kind advice last year about family prayers. Alick,"—his nephew—"who has been one great instrument in God's hands in bringing us all into the fold of Christ, Alick, I say, and I sometimes wish you were here to see how heartily now we join in these prayers. The world seems quite changed. 'All old things now are passed away.'"

From the commencement of his Christian course to the end of his life, he held on his way with unwavering steadfastness. His family, the church (of which he became an office-bearer), his friends, the many guests who from time to time enjoyed his generous hospitality, and not least his patients, all felt that his religion was a vigorous, living reality. There befell him sore trials in the loss of dear children. His son David, a young man of great promise, who had entered on his own profession, was taken at the age of four-and-twenty; and his eldest daughter, a sweet, gentle girl of seventeen, followed. These bereavements, which he felt most keenly, were borne with meek, patient submission. He had good hope with respect to both his children, and their death made the heaven to which they had gone the dearer to his heart. Then, too, in his later years, he was often visited by severe sickness. God was thus making him "meet for the inheritance."

In the beginning of 1870, it became evident both to himself and his friends that the end was surely approaching. He was sustained throughout his last illness by the precious comforts of the gospel. No cloud ever passed over his spirit. He rested with a calm, undoubting faith on the great sacrifice of Jesus, and on His present and all-sufficient grace. "It has happily come to this," he said: "I am a sinner needing a Saviour, and Jesus is the Saviour I need."

On the morning of the 6th of May, his spirit passed into the presence of Christ.

“Another had joined that illustrious company of foremost men who, bringing all their great gifts and varied attainments with them, have entered the kingdom of God as little children. To the list that holds the names of Newton, Boyle, Boerhaave, Cuvier, Abercrombie, Chalmers, Brewster, Lyndhurst, and other ‘chiefs of the mighties,’ we now add James Young Simpson’s. With them he had made that discovery of God’s purpose in His creation which Augustine states so tenderly on the threshold of his Confessions: ‘Thou hast made us for Thyself, O God, and our heart is disquieted till it rests in Thee.’”

There—there only—reader, will you find rest. Cast the burden of your sins by grace on the great sacrifice, and pray for the renewing grace of the Divine Spirit, who can make all things new. So soon as you thus trust in Christ you will find “rest unto your soul,” and with the rest, “joy unspeakable and full of glory.”



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